



GETTING WELL

Healing the Sick in Early America

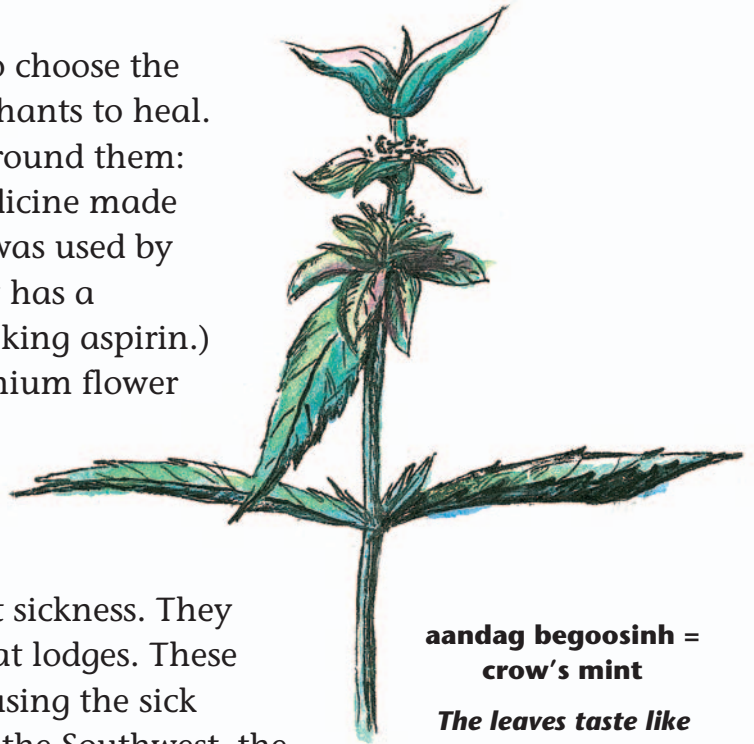
Do you go to the doctor when you are sick? Hundreds of years ago, a Native American child who was sick was also cared for by people whose specialty was healing. Some of these specialists were herbalists, people who knew all about healing with medicines made from plants and animals. Some were spiritual leaders, who might have worn ceremonial masks to put on the power of a healing spirit. With music and chants, the spiritual leader would comfort the sick child and invite healing power to enter the house. Depending on how sick the patient was, the “house call” might last several days and include special ceremonies.

These healers were highly respected by all members of the tribe—some had almost as much power as the chief did.

Healers were guided by the spirits to choose the correct medicines, songs, rituals, and chants to heal. Their medicines came from the land around them: leaves, tree bark, roots, and herbs. Medicine made from the bark of a certain willow tree was used by some Indians to stop pain. (The willow has a chemical similar to what is used in making aspirin.) The Iroquois boiled the roots of a geranium flower to make a tea that helped dry wounds and sores. The roots of the yellow lady's slipper flower were used by the Cherokee to treat colds.

Healers also had other ways to treat sickness. They often performed healing rituals in sweat lodges. These special lodges were very hot inside, causing the sick patients to sweat away their illness. In the Southwest, the Navajo healers created pictures with colored sand near a sick person. The sand absorbed the evil that was causing the sickness, then blew away in the wind, taking the sickness with it. From willow bark to aspirin, from sweat lodges to warm baths—have things really changed in the last 500 years? No matter when you grow up, you still need to “see the doctor” when you get sick.

Adapted from an article by Barbara Hagen
Illustrated by Lois Beardslee



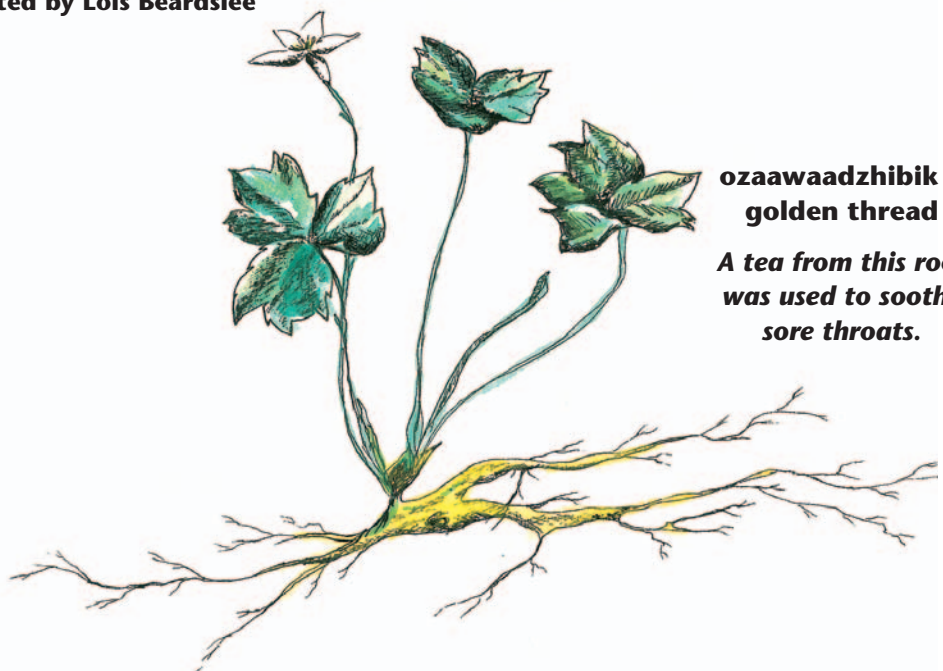
**aandag begoosinh =
crow's mint**

*The leaves taste like
oregano and were made
into tea, to help cure
stomach and intestinal
problems.*



**manaboozhoo obiikwazh =
yellow lily bulb**

*A paste made from the bulb
of this wild lily drew poison
from insect and snake bites.*



**ozaawaadzhibik =
golden thread**

*A tea from this root
was used to soothe
sore throats.*